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No. 40.

“A QUEEN’S
MESSENGER”

BY

J. HARTLEY MANNERS

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A QUEEN'S MESSENGER"

ohn BY
J. HARTLEY MANNERS

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“A QUEEN’S MESSENGER”

DRAMA IN ONE ACT

BY

J. HARTLEY MANNERS.

Originally Produced at the Haymarket Theatre, June 26th, 1899.

CHARACTERS.

AN ENGLISH OFFICER..... Mr. C. Aubrey Smith.

A MASKED LADY..... Miss Granville.

SCENE.—A Lonely House on the Outskirts of Berlin.

*Revived at the Avenue Theatre on October 6th, 1899,
with the following cast:*

AN ENGLISH OFFICER..... Mr. A. Holmes Gore

A MASKED LADY..... Miss Granville.

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MAR 27 '28

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“A QUEEN’S MESSENGER.”

Folding windows at back opening on to garden. Table C., on which are a large triple photo-frame and a bowl of matches. Chairs R. and L. of table and behind table. Small writing-table down R., with writing materials. Cabinet at back to L. of window. Fireplace L. Sofa down L. There are two candlesticks with candles on mantelpiece L. and on cabinet at back. Lamp at back to R. of window. Vase to be broken L. of window. In the cabinet are a bottle of wine, glasses and a corkscrew. In the drawer of the writing-table is a small revolver. The room is perfectly dark save for the rays of moonlight streaming through the window and indicating clearly the gravel walk leading up to the room. Dead silence for a second or two after rising of the curtain, then the sound of horses' hoofs coming at a smart trot, together with the rattle of wheels and the jingling of bells, is heard. Then the grating sound of the horse being brought to a standstill, two or three peals of bells as the horse tosses his head; then the sound of voices and footsteps, and two figures are seen in the moonlight walking up the path. A man, carrying something heavy, which he changes from one hand to the other on account of its weight, and a lady in a mask and domino. They walk straight to the window, the lady a little in advance, talking to each other indistinctly. The lady inserts a key into the lock in the frame of the window, a sharp click is heard; she pushes the window inwards, quite wide open, then enters the room cautiously. She turns when inside and speaks to the man in a slightly foreign accent.

LADY. You had better remain outside. You will break things.

OFFICER. All right. Go ahead.

LADY. It is so *very* dark. (*feeling her way carefully to R. of window, she finds the lamp R.*) Ah, yes!

OFFI. (*changing the heavy article from one hand to the other*) I say!

LADY. What do you say? (*moving down R. C. and groping on table for something*)

OFFI. I, must put this confounded bag down. It's breaking both my arms. (*Stepping cautiously inside, moon full on him; he is seen to be carrying a large bag*)

LADY. (*still searching on table*) Be *ve-ry* careful!

OFFI. (*drops bag with sigh of relief—it falls on the vase to L. of window, which noisily crumbles to pieces*) Confound! (*picks up the bag and deposits it L. C.*)

LADY. Ah! I knew you would break things. Keep still.

OFFI. Dreadfully sorry. I say, look sharp and light up.

LADY. I have no—matches—eh?

OFFI. Oh, that's all right, I have. (*takes a step towards her, comes in contact with a small chair upright, which yields to his weight, and falls to the floor*) Ugh!

LADY. You will break *everything*!

OFFI. (*striking a match*) Such footle leaving 'em about like that. (*limping over towards her*)

LADY. You have hurt yourself, eh?

OFFI. About two inches of skin gone. (*sheltering match from draught with his hand*)

LADY. Give it to me. (*she takes match from him and proceeds to light the lamp; he rests his foot on a chair L. of table and aggrievedly rubs the injury*) I told you to keep still, eh? Poor boy! I'm sorry. There (*she has now succeeded in lighting the lamp*) Have you another match, eh? (*she is R. of table*)

OFFI. Heaps. (*taking out box*)

LADY. Then will you light the candles? See! (*indicating them on mantelpiece L.*)

OFFI. Certainly. (*strikes matches and limps about lighting candles on mantelpiece*)

LADY. There is no one at home yet. They are all at the dance. (*going over to writing-table R.*)

OFFI. Is that enough? (*he has now lighted the candles on the mantelpiece*)

LADY. (*surveying them over her shoulder*) Ye-es! Oh! the two over there. (*indicating cabinet*) That is where the "what you drink" is. (*sits at table, begins to write*)

OFFI. Ah! Must light that up. (*limps across and lights them*) Quite an illumination.

LADY. I will not keep you a moment. It is so good of you to be my messenger.

OFFI. On the contrary, it is a privilege. (*moving down C.*) Besides the occasion is so extraordinary.

LADY. Is it not? Fancy you knowing Leo! It is wonderful. He will be so surprised when you hand him my letter.

OFFI. That very important letter. (*taking off cloak, places it on sofa*)

LADY. Oh, it is *most* important. If it miscarried, the consequences would be terrible. (*during the speeches she is writing a letter*)

OFFI. Really? You alarm me. (*picks up chair R. off floor*)

LADY. That is why I did not like to trust it to the postman. See? Letters from Berlin are not always safe. (*addressing envelope*) There! You will wait a little while?

OFFI. If I may.

LADY. My people should be back at once. What is the time? (*rises*)

OFFI. (*looking at watch*) Twenty-five past one.

LADY. And your train?

OFFI. Train goes at half-past two.

LADY. And you must go away when? (*moving towards him*)

OFFI. In—let me see—in half an hour. (*pockets watch*)

LADY. The carriage will wait for you, eh? (*quite close to him*)

OFFI. Oh, yes. I made that all right. Used up most of my German trying to make him understand.

LADY. But he is French. (*with a little gesture of amusement*)

OFFI. So I found out. (*laughing*)

LADY. (*laughs with him—then hands him letter*)
Here is the important letter (*reads the address with him*) "To Count Leo Morovski, Russian Embassy, London." I cannot thank you enough for taking all this trouble and going so much out of your way for me.

OFFI. Not at all. The house is en route to the station. I'm charmed to do even so slight a service for you. (*pauses—looks at her a moment*) May I, in return, ask a favor?

LADY. Mais oui.

OFFI. I am afraid you will think it presumption. It is that you remove that mask.

LADY. But why?

OFFI. So that I may know my companion of a few pleasant hours.

LADY. But you will not know then.

OFFI. But I shall see.

LADY. How very English. You always want to *see*—and you never know *what* you see. There! (*she removes her mask, drops her domino, and stands revealed—a dark, passionate, handsome woman, superbly dressed and bejeweled*)

OFFI. (*taking a step backwards, in admiration*) By Jove!

LADY. (*with a little pleased laugh*) You are surprised, eh?

OFFI. Surely—surely—we have met before?

LADY. Do you think so?

OFFI. You were at the reception at the Embassy on Monday night?

LADY. I was.

OFFI. And at Lady Cleveden's afterwards?

LADY. Yes.

OFFI. I am so glad to meet you—you quite puzzled me.

LADY. Why?

OFFI. Because, although you seemed to know everybody, no one could tell me your name.

LADY. And for a very good reason—they could not pronounce it. (*puts mask and domino on chair by writing table*)

OFFI. (*a little pause*) I wonder if I could?

LADY. No—no—no—it is a horrid—stupid—long, nasty name.

OFFI. Yet the owner of it is very beautiful.

LADY. Ah! a compliment—from an Englishman. It is good! (R.)

OFFI. It is the truth. (R. C.)

LADY. Of course. It is always a compliment for an Englishman to speak the truth. And so you must go away in half an hour, eh?

OFFI. (*regretfully*) Unfortunately.

LADY. Unfortunately? Do you not wish to go?

OFFI. Not now.

LADY. (*going up to him*) Then go by another train.

OFFI. Daren't!

LADY. Dare—not!

OFFI. No. Duty!

LADY. So? But—(*coming closer to him*) a man's duty is always to a woman, eh?

OFFI. Always.

LADY. (*touching him with her fan*) Well?

OFFI. My duty is to a woman—to my Queen! Her Imperial Majesty calls me to Whitehall, London.

LADY. *Indeed!* You are a very disappointing person. (*crosses over to sofa*)

OFFI. I am a Queen's messenger.

LADY. (*turning quickly*) So? You carry messages?

OFFI. Yes, I carry messages.

LADY. Then you are a very *important* person?

OFFI. Very. (*lightly and chaffingly*) I carry the destinies of countries in my breast pocket, treaties in my cigar case, and an emperor's ransom in my travelling bag.

LADY. But you are so young.

OFFI. Nine and twenty.

LADY. A *beautiful* age. (*sits on sofa*) One knows *nothing* at nine and twenty. Oh, I wish I were nine and twenty instead of—

OFFI. Instead of——? (*crossing to head of sofa*)

LADY. A hundred! That is what I feel to-night. But tell me, Messenger, do you not sometimes feel afraid?

OFFI. Sometimes.

LADY. Aha! I thought an Englishman never felt afraid?

OFFI. Only when he looks in a woman's eyes. (*looking down at her*)

LADY. Oho! (*smiling up into his eyes*) **You** are frightened now, eh?

OFFI. Almost.

LADY. Of me?

OFFI. Of myself.

LADY. And yet there is a little word that banishes fear, eh?

OFFI. (*bending over her*) Love?

LADY. Duty!

OFFI. (*looks at her a moment*) True. (*moves to C.*) I had forgotten.

LADY. Duty before all else, eh? Your Queen before all others, eh?

OFFI. Yes—my Queen before all others.

LADY. It is beautiful.

OFFI. It is English.

LADY. Lucky Queen.

OFFI. Lucky messenger.

LADY. Oh, but how stupid of me. You are thirsty, eh? (*going up to cabinet*) I wonder if we have anything (*searching*) No—no—ah, yes!

OFFI. (*goes to table, C., picks up photo-frame*) What wonderful photographs. (*opening out frame*)

LADY. (*coming down with bottle and corkscrew*) Do you like them?

OFFI. (*taking bottle from her and opening it*) They are beautiful. Where were they taken?

LADY. In Petersburg.

OFFI. Petersburg?

LADY. I was born in Petersburg.

OFFI. Why, my next appointment will be there. (*pouring out wine*)

LADY. Indeed! (*taking up glass*) Then we may meet again.

OFFI. I'm sure I hope we do. (*fills glass while talking, and raises it to his lips*) To our next meeting, (*drinks*)

LADY. (*looks first at big bag*) To our present meeting. (*drinks*)

OFFI. By Jove, it's good stuff.

LADY. Is it not? I like all good stuff.

OFFI. What a lucky chance my going to the ball last night; wasn't it? (*approaching her*)

LADY. I meant that you should go to the ball last night. (*sits L. of table*)

OFFI. You meant that I should go? (*leaning against table*)

LADY. I sent you the ticket.

OFFI. Did you?

LADY. Yes. You arrived four days ago. The first night you were here you went to the theatre—so did I. You drove to the Embassy each morning—past my hotel. I said, "Who is that?" "An English officer." "So? and where does he stay?" "At the Hotel Royale." "Bien! I like him. I will send for him. But how? You English are so distant—when anyone is looking—especially you diplomatic English. Suppose I send for you where everyone *looks* and no one—*sees* a bal masque at the Opera. It is a happy thought. But will he go? I send you the ticket and wait impatiently all day. At night I hear you have left your hotel. It is good! I drive to l'opera . . . I see you enter . . . I make you speak with me—you tell me you are going to England to-night. I think of my message to Leo—I ask you—you consent—Voilà! we are here. (*rising*)

OFFI. And in half an hour's time I will have gone.

LADY. (*towards him*) And we may never meet again! Why must you go by that train?

OFFI. If I missed it my despatches would be late.

LADY. Would that matter very much?

OFFI. Yes, it would.

LADY. They are so important?

OFFI. They are *very* important.

LADY. Well, go! (*crossing to mantelpiece L.*) I don't want to keep you. You are like all Englishmen. You are all 'self, self, self! You never care for anyone *but* yourself. (*walks up and down indignantly*)

OFFI. What do you mean? (*rises and crosses to C.*)

LADY. It does not matter if *I* miss *you* so long as *you* do not miss your *train*.

OFFI. That is rather unreasonable.

LADY. Of course. A woman is always unreasonable to an Englishman.

OFFI. Would you really miss me? (*going towards her—the bag between them*)

LADY. Certainly not. Go away at once! Take your big bag and go. (*slight pause—look of sudden thought comes into her eyes, then smilingly she repeats slowly*) Your big—bag! Oho! (*looking at it*) They are in

there, eh? How very wonderful. They are lying quietly asleep in that big bag, eh? A country's peace or a country's trouble sealed up in an envelope (*she is L. of the bag—the man R. of it*)

OFFI. A country's peace or a country's trouble often lies in my big bag sealed in an envelope.

LADY. It makes me quite frightened (*with a little shudder*)

OFFI. Why?

LADY. Because it makes me think——

OFFI. Of what?

LADY. My country—my *poor* country.

OFFI. That is Europe's safeguard (*moving to C.*)

LADY. (*quickly*) What is?

OFFI. That Russia is poor.

LADY. She may not be always. (*up to him*)

OFFI. No?

LADY. India is rich.

OFFI. And belongs to us.

LADY. *That* may not be always.

OFFI. (*easily*) Oh, I think so.

LADY. You English think so much. You are so sure.

OFFI. We have to be.

LADY. How do you know that the Russian bear is not crossing the frontier at this moment?

OFFI. Not the slightest chance of that.

LADY. Prevention is better than cure, eh?

OFFI. Much better.

LADY. So-o? Your despatches are indeed important, messenger. (*tapping him on the sleeve with her fan*)

OFFI. (*on his guard in an instant*) I know nothing they contain.

LADY. No? (*laughing*) Then what a good guess! Ha, ha, ha! Why do you not go?

OFFI. I have twenty minutes yet. Don't turn me out.

LADY. You can do just what you like. (*back to him*)

OFFI. (*sitting down*) May I smoke?

LADY. Do whatever you please. (*arranging her hair in the mirror*)

OFFI. I say, don't be angry. (*sits L. of table, takes out cigar-case, and selects a cigar*) You'll spoil everything.

LADY. It is you who spoil everything (*moving down and bending suddenly over him*) Go by the next train.

OFFI. (*shaking his finger at her*) Ah! Duty! Duty!

LADY. (*impatiently*) Oh! You English regulate your lives by a silly little word of four letters.

OFFI. Jolly good little word for all that. (*taking out cigar-cutter, which is attached, together with key-ring and signet-ring, to a steel chain fastened at the waist*) Now do sit down.

LADY. I shall do nothing of the kind. (*sitting down suddenly at back of table, seeing the cutter*) Oh, what a funny little thing. May I look at it?

OFFI. Of course (*detaching the entire key-ring, signet-ring, and cutter from his chain and handing them to her*) Rather neat, isn't it?

LADY. What is it for?

OFFI. Cigar-cutter. See? (*showing the cut cigar*)

LADY. It is very clever—(*holding it up*) and very beautiful. A moonstone mounted in opals. It is unlucky, eh?

OFFI. (*lighting cigar*) That never troubles me.

LADY. Has it a history?

OFFI. No. Bought it in a Cairo bazar.

LADY. (*touching signet-ring*) What is this?

OFFI. Signet-ring. That *has* a history.

LADY. Indeed!

OFFI. It belonged to an old warrior-ancestor of mine. Dates back to the Knights of Malta!

LADY. Why do you not wear it?

OFFI. Can't. (*holds up hand*) They don't make fingers that size *this* generation.

LADY. It could be altered.

OFFI. Sacrilege.

LADY. And so you carry it on there?

OFFI. Yes. I carry it on there.

LADY. With your keys?

OFFI. Yes. *They're* like the messenger—very important.

LADY. Oh, what a large one! What is it for?

OFFI. Latch key, Conduit Street, London. Brought it away by mistake.

LADY. So? And that one?

OFFI. That one? Bureau—Conduit Street, London.

LADY. And this?

OFFI. Locker—Guards' Club, London.

LADY. Oh, what a funny little key.

OFFI. Made in New York.

LADY. Really? What is it for?

OFFI. (*pause, looks at bag*) "The big bag."

LADY. (*looks across at bag*) So-o? And that one?

OFFI. Both belong to the bag.

LADY. The big message bag, eh?

OFFI. Yes. Well guarded, isn't it? (*laughing*)

LADY. In Russia we give our messenger a guard of honor.

OFFI. In England each man guards his own.

LADY. It is wise?

OFFI. It seems to be.

LADY. Do the messages ever miscarry?

OFFI. Never.

LADY. And if they did? What would become of the messenger?

OFFI. Depends on the man.

LADY. What would you do?

OFFI. Never thought of it.

LADY. I wonder! (*the jingle of bells outside is heard as the horse tosses his head, and the sound of the hoofs stamping on the hard road. The man and woman look at each other for a second. She turns away repeating*) I wonder!

OFFI. (*second pause*) Walk off the edge of things I expect.

LADY. Kill yourself?

OFFI. I expect so.

LADY. Yet you are not a coward.

OFFI. Don't think I am.

LADY. Could you not look trouble in the face?

OFFI. Not that sort.

LADY. I know one trouble you do not mind looking in the face.

OFFI. Do you?

LADY. And one you will always seek.

OFFI. Oh! What's that?

LADY. (*pause, brings her face near his*) Woman!

OFFI. By Jove, yes. But then that trouble has a face worth looking at—sometimes. (*bending across the table to her and unwittingly allowing a cloud of smoke to pass over her. She rises and coughs*) I'm awfully sorry.

LADY. Horrid smoke. (*coughing*) Your cigar is like yourself—large and strong. (*still coughing and moving down R.*)

OFFI. I'll throw it away. (*walks up to fireplace and throws it in grate*)

LADY. I'll give you a cigarette. (*laying down bunch of keys on table, crosses to C.*)

OFFI. Oh, no. That's all right. (*moving L. C.*)

LADY. Please. (*holding out cigarette case to him*)

OFFI. It's awfully good of you.

LADY. I'm always awfully good.

OFFI. (*takes the case from her, is about to take one, hands case back and takes case from pocket*) I'm afraid I'm rather conservative. I'll smoke one of my own.

LADY. No, no, no. Please! See—I'll smoke with you.

OFFI. Very well. (*about to take one*)

LADY. No—no—take a *big* one—the *little* ones are for me. (*they take one each—he lights hers first—then his own. Indicating his cigarette*) I do not like them.

OFFI. Ah! (*inhaling and blowing a cloud through his nose*) They are curious. (*examining texture of cigarette*) Where do they come from?

LADY. Petersburg.

OFFI. (*inhaling again*) They're not pure tobacco.

LADY. No? A mixture?

OFFI. It reminds me of something.

LADY. (*turning quickly*) Of what?

OFFI. I can't fix it.

LADY. I should not try. (*crossing to L.—gets rid of cigarette*)

OFFI. I won't. (*looking at her admiringly*) By the way—why did you invite me to the ball—in the first instance? (*sits on edge of table*)

LADY. Why did I? Because I am a very stupid person, sometimes.

OFFI. Oh! come——

LADY. *Ve-ry* stupid. I have what you English call the sentiments.

OFFI. Sentiments?

LADY. Yes, I am a very sentimental person. That was why I sent for you.

OFFI. Yes, but I say——

LADY. You inspired me with a great sentiment. I was *so sorry* for you. I pitied you from the top of my heart.

OFFI. Pitied me?

LADY. You were walking with your eyes shut, on the edge of an abyss, and there was no one to say to you, "Keep back!" All day I thought of you—all night I dreamed of you. (*rises and moves to C.*)

OFFI. Dreamed?

LADY. That you had fallen in!

OFFI. (*laughing*) To the abyss?

LADY. (*facing him*) To the trap!!

OFFI. What trap?

LADY. The trap that has been set for you ever since you arrived in Berlin.

OFFI. I don't understand.

LADY. I did not expect that you would. I saw you rushing headlong into danger, and then I said to myself, "Poor stupid fellow, I will save him." And I have saved you. (*he gives a little ejaculation*) You do not believe me. I will make you. Spies have followed you every day you have been here. Whenever you have gone out you have been dogged, when you have stayed in you have been watched.

OFFI. May I ask why?

LADY. So that the papers you carry shall not reach England.

OFFI. Indeed? And the spies? Germans?

LADY. No! Russians!

OFFI. (*turns quickly*) How do you know this?

LADY. (*a little embarrassed—turning away*) I know a good deal about my country.

OFFI. They would have had some little difficulty in preventing the papers from reaching England. (*sitting on table*)

LADY. They would have had no difficulty at all.

OFFI. Pardon me, I have conducted missions far more dangerous than this one.

LADY. Yet, had you gone back to your hotel last night, your despatches would never have been delivered. (OFFICER *smilingly strokes his moustache*) You think not, eh? Very good. If you drive past your hotel on the way to the train, you will see men waiting in the shadows. They are waiting for you.

(*movement by OFFICER*) You begin to believe! I said to myself, "He is a brave man, he is armed, he will fight, and they will kill him. What a pity!" So I sent for you. I made you send for your *big* bag—the precious bag. *It is here—you are here—in a few moments you will go away quite safely—and then—you will forget all about me. Is it not so? You are silent. You believe me now?*

OFFI. Yes. (*rises*)

LADY. See? Am I not a very *absurd* person? (*moves down L.*)

OFFI. (*walks right over to her L. Pause*) A very extraordinary—a very kind one. (*holds out his hand*)

LADY. That is all right. (*ignoring his hand*)

OFFI. I owe you the safety of my charge.

LADY. Ha, ha, ha! (*little light laugh*)

OFFI. (*quietly and intensely*) I owe you, perhaps, my life.

LADY. Your life? (*she turns inwards to him, their eyes meet—again is heard the jingle of bells and the pawing of horses' hoofs upon the road—little pause. In low tones, meeting his gaze*) You mean that had you escaped, but your papers had been stolen—you would have—killed yourself.

OFFI. Yes.

LADY. That would be very foolish.

OFFI. Perhaps.

LADY. (*crossing over to C., then breaking the tensity of the situation*) But then, all your countrymen are foolish, eh?

OFFI. (*throws cigarette in fireplace, moves to C.*) I, for one, plead guilty. A moment ago I dreamt you had brought me here because—because I had made—a conquest.

LADY. Oh—an Englishman's most beautiful dream!—that he is taking something he has no right to from someone else. (*withdrawing her hand*) Have another cigarette. (*hands him case. OFFICER takes one, lights it, and puts case on table*) And another glass of wine. (*pouring it out*)

OFFI. (*pause*) I, too, am a sentimental person, on occasions. I am now.

LADY. Is it for me?

OFFI. Yes—for you.

LADY. Ha, ha, ha!

OFFI. It is one of gratitude. You have saved my honor—my life—my love. *(little pause between each. She laughs at "honor" and "life," but on the word "love," she looks him in the eyes. Pause)*

LADY. Your love! Oho! Then there is some one you love?

OFFI. With all my heart and soul.

LADY. Is she English?

OFFI. Yes.

LADY. Poor girl! *(aside, pityingly, under her breath)*

OFFI. Had those papers been stolen, it would have meant not merely disgrace, ruin, a blot on an old name, it would have meant the breaking of the dearest heart God ever made. Strange lady, I am grateful.

LADY. That is all right, messenger. Now you will understand why you received the invitation for last night.

OFFI. Yes. *(sits L. of table)*

LADY. Were you not surprised when I asked you to come here?

OFFI. *(brightly—entire change—tosses off glass—replaces it on table)* I never thought of that—the whole thing was an adventure. I had been kept at the grindstone pretty tightly the four days I had been here. It was thought wiser to travel at night. I was left with my last evening on my hands. Your invitation came——

LADY. Ha, ha, ha!

OFFI. I went—met you—and——

LADY. And you came here to do something for me.

OFFI. To be your messenger!

LADY. *(down R., looking straight before her)* Suppose that was not my real reason for bringing you with me. Suppose I have nothing important to sent to Count Morovski, that I have no mother and no sisters—that I live here all alone, what would you say to that?

OFFI. You are not serious?

LADY. Suppose I am—quite serious?

OFFI. You live here alone?

LADY. Quite alone! And that letter I gave you is so important that you can tear it up. Now, do you understand?

OFFI. I'm afraid I don't.

LADY. Ha, ha, ha ! do not be alarmed ! It was only a woman's whim. There is no harm done. You can go away now, and no one will be any the wiser.

OFFI. (*looks at her—suddenly passion leaps into his eyes*) Not yet !

LADY. You do not wish to go yet ?

OFFI. No. (*excitedly*) I want to be near you—to hear the sound of your voice, to—(*he is quite close to her*)

LADY. Oh, ha, ha ! So—you are like all other men—weak—eh ?

OFFI. Weak ? What of it ? If man was never weak, half the history of the world would not be written.

LADY. (*crossing to C.*) Because the world is made of men and women !

OFFI. (*vehemently—catching her tone*) Yes ! Men and women ! (*pause—suddenly takes her in his arms*)

LADY. (*repulses him with*) No, no no ! (*he staggers to table—pause*) A moment ago you spoke of the dearest heart God ever made—eh ? (*he looks at her a moment, while she holds his gaze, then he drops his eyes on to the ground, and leans for support on table*) Is this loyal to that heart ? You do not answer ? It is contemptible, eh ? So you brave men are sometimes contemptible ! Again you are silent. A false step with the papers you carry, and you would betray your Queen. For that you would kill yourself. Yet a false step at a bal masqué, with a stranger, betrays the Queen of your love, and poof !—it is nothing. Yes—you English are brave. (*he staggers up to window to get air. Again is heard the jingle of the bells outside—the man and woman look at each other. He throws away his cigarette, takes out his watch—looks at it under the lamp*) You have a little longer. (*anxiously*)

OFFI. Five minutes.

LADY. (*relieved*) Ah ! (*holding out case again*)

OFFI. (*comes down, looking inside*) Only two left. (*LADY makes movement pressing him to accept*) Thanks. They rather grow on one. (*falls back into chair L. of table*) Gad, that wine has gone to my head.

LADY. Is that weak too ? (*right round back of table, to R.*)

OFFI. Ha, ha, ha ! You're rather severe. (*lights cigarette—inhalés with apparent enjoyment*)

LADY. I am *very* severe, sometimes.

OFFI. I suppose you are *never* weak.

LADY. Alas! I am a woman.

OFFI. Deucedly strongminded one. Ha, ha, ha!

LADY. That is only one side of me.

OFFI. It is the only one you've given me a glimpse of.

LADY. I would not like you to see the other.

OFFI. I suppose *you* have never felt a grande passion?

LADY. Do you? Well, you are *quite* wrong. (*she moves nervously up to back, near window—watching him*)

OFFI. You have a lover? (*unsteadily*)

LADY. I have. (*coming down c.*)

OFFI. Indeed. Ha, ha, ha! Is he—is he brave?

LADY. (*her face lighting up for a moment*) Brave! Mon Dieu! (*turning fiercely on him*) He is a *man*, a soldier—a soldier of his Czar's—his King's! Parbleu! Had he the mission you have entrusted to you, he would lay them at the feet of his Queen if he had to cut a passage through a thousand men.

OFFI. (*slightly dazed, his hand on his forehead*) Eh? what's that? A thousand men? So would I—ten—ten thousand.

LADY. *He* is a soldier of the battlefield, not of the café, the opera and the boudoir. Do you think *he* would fall *openly* into a trap—carry his precious messages into the very hands of the enemy?

OFFI. (*trying to collect his thoughts*) Enemy? What do you mean?

LADY. I mean, Captain Standish, emissary of your Queen, that I am an emissary of the Imperial Court of Russia—that I have brought you here to rob you of what you profess to be dearer to you than life!

OFFI. Rob me?

LADY. (*back of chair L. of table*) Your train leaves at two-thirty. You will not travel by it. Be careful, Captain, when next you smoke with a Russian lady that her cigarettes are pure tobacco and not a *mixture*! (*the cigarette drops from his fingers; he leans back against the table, holding it with one hand for support, whilst the other goes to his forehead. He looks straight before him*) Your mission is more dangerous than you supposed, eh? and yet instead of a thousand—ten thou-

sand men—you have to face only one woman. You say nothing? I forgot—you English *think* so much! (*crossing down R.*)

OFFI. My head! my head! (*pressing his forehead with both hands*)

LADY. (*up to writing-table R.*) What a beautiful trap. Had the opiate failed—had you not smoked—I would have had to use this. See? (*shows a tiny revolver, which she takes from drawer in writing-table*) It is full of little bullets, and it goes off quite easily. Had you escaped that, there was yet another risk— (*jingle of bells again, the sound of a man's voice soothing the horse*) Listen—François—he is all over pistols—and he is waiting for *you*. They wait for you at the hotel—at the station. A *very* dangerous mission, eh? Ha! ha! You escape them all, and yet fall a victim to a poor, weak woman. How very English.

OFFI. (*rises feebly*) Ha, ha, ha! What are you talking about? Oh, my head. What's the time? Train goes—half-past two—I must be going—no time to lose— (*totters away from table*) Good-bye—awfully obliged— Oh, my head! ha, ha, ha! How stupid of me—to feel like this—been drinking—where's the bag (*feeling his way as he staggers, aided by the furniture, towards the bag*) Carriage outside—sorry to have to go—messenger, you know—qu—queen's messenger—the bag—ah! Here— (*stumbles against it; is about to stoop down to lift it—staggers again—presses both hands to his forehead*) Oh—my head—I—I—don't know—what I'm doing. Ha, ha, ha! (*laughing hysterically*) What am I laughing at?—train—must catch it—queen's—queen's—messenger—Oh—h! (*sinks asleep across bag*)

The lady stands watching him for a moment; then she goes to him, listens to his breathing, which is thick. She nods with satisfaction, and kneels down and gently removes the bag from beneath him. Her face has now completely changed; it is stern, pale, implacable; the brows knit, the features working with suppressed excitement. Dead silence in the room save for the heavy breathing of the man. She thinks a moment, then goes quickly to the window and gives a low whistle. It is answered. Then the sound of a man's voice; the rattling of steel as the reins are gathered; the toss of the bells; then the sound of a

horse's hoofs going off at a smart trot; the rattle of the wheels, the jingling of the bells, loudly at first, then dying away gradually in the distance; then silence.

LADY. Gone! (*moving to prostrate figure*) You will not catch your train, Captain Standish. Sleep soundly! (*looks down at him, shrugs her shoulders contemptuously*) To trust you with despatches! England is a great country. Mais oui—it is very wonderful—the material is sometimes so small. I must be quick or he will wake. (*crosses to table, takes up bunch of keys*) The keys—all right (*kneels down to bag, tries two; third fits; she unlocks*) That is one! (*she unlocks the other, presses the lever; the bag opens; she throws the keys on the table, turns back to the bag*) Sesame! (*ransacking*) Clothes! Letters! Books! Clothes again—ah, what is this! (*takes out a packet with a big red seal.*) Kismet! ~~A~~ mission has not failed. I talk not of my loyalty to every stranger—it is *here* (*touching her heart*) For if I would cheat, lie, kill, and at the end—what? What my reward? Exile! Death! Who knows? Who cares? No one except Leo! Except Leo! (*lays despatch on table while speaking, closes bag, but does not re-lock it; then drags the bag to its old position, and lifts his arm on it. The man moans slightly, as though in pain. She looks at him, then bends down over him. A changed look comes into her eyes*) Poor fellow!

OFFI. (*moves restlessly in his sleep, eyes closed; then speaks in a hoarse whisper*) Quick, or we'll miss it! Go on! Faster—faster still—go like hell—that's right—ha, ha, like hell. (*feeble, hysterical laugh*) Ha, ha, ha! Is that the whistle in the distance—it can't be! How beautiful you are—What? In danger? No one dare touch them—I bear a charmed life—with—my despatches—they *are* my life—Take off—that mask, won't you? (*she silently goes to table, soaks her handkerchief in the wine—goes back—places it on his forehead. The man moves under her touch*) I can't hear you—what would Constance say? She'd love you for having saved me—you don't know how she loves me—she thinks the world of me—and—and—I'm not worth it! Go on! I can see the lights—look!—there's the train! It's on the crest of the hill—don't you see it? Hurrah! I'll

do it! Stop!—wait!—you *must!*—a messenger—she called me *her* messenger—(*breathing gets more regular; she bends down over him, moistening his hands with the handkerchief*)

LADY. He is waking—waking to what? Disgrace, shame, death—for he will kill himself—I saw it in his face. And why not? Leo would do it too. It is the only thing. Nothing can heal dishonor—for a woman—yes—for a man—no! *Poor fellow!* Why should I pity him! (*a thought coming to her*) If this were Leo—if *he* lay in some woman's room—drugged—robbed—if he—(*shaking off the thought*) Leo! No—no! *He* would not run such a risk—he is loyal to his country—and to me! (*another thought as she glances down at the man*) Yet what was that he said? "If man was never weak, half the history of the world would not be written." It is true! All men have their moments—yes—even the bravest—and he is brave—(*looking down at him*) *Poor fellow!* (*movement by OFFICER*) He has had his moment—he is waking now to pay the price.

The OFFICER opens his eyes—presses his hand to his forehead. She rises, watching him. He seems to be endeavoring to gather his thoughts, and struggles into a kneeling position. She walks slowly backwards to the table, watching him intently. Suddenly something of the truth breaks in on him, and he convulsively looks for the bag. He rapidly feels the lock. She takes advantage of his turning away to hurriedly take the despatch from the table and thrust it into the triple photo-frame, and place it face downwards on the table. She turns—the man staggers to his feet. They stand facing each other—a neighboring clock strikes two.

OFFI. (*hoarsely*) Two! The train! (*totters weakly to window*)

LADY. Stop. The carriage has gone. (*by table c.*)

OFFI. Gone?

LADY. Yes.

OFFI. But I must get to the train—I must. (*down by her*)

LADY. Too late.

OFFI. Too late. No, no—it can't be too late. Don't you understand, I *must* catch it—don't—you understand?

LADY. I understand.

OFFI. Oh, my head—get me away—I've only half an hour—help me to get away.

LADY. No!

OFFI. No? Good God. You decoyed me here!

LADY. Yes—so that the papers you carry should not reach England.

OFFI. (*pause—looks at her—grasps the situation—turns away—takes a step down L. in undertone*) What can I do? What can I do? (*then drawing himself up*) The carriage you say has gone? (*turning towards her*)

LADY. Yes.

OFFI. We two are alone—beyond earshot?

LADY. Quite alone.

OFFI. Then listen to me. Close as the net is that you have drawn around me you have forgotten one thing.

LADY. Indeed?

OFFI. You have forgotten to draw it tightly enough. Madam, spy of the Russian Government, you are my prisoner. (*taking C.*)

LADY. So?

OFFI. Further still—my despatch shall reach Whitehall in time.

LADY. Indeed? And how?

OFFI. At daybreak you shall be under arrest—and the despatch flashed across Europe.

LADY. To do this you would want the despatch, eh?

OFFI. (*instinctively his hand goes to his chain—the keys are missing—kneels down to bag—presses the lever—the bag flies open—searches—misses despatch*) The despatch—where is it?

LADY. In the hands of an official of the Russian government.

OFFI. In yours? (*up to her*)

LADY. (*pointing to window*) You forget François and the carriage. (*officer makes movement towards window*) He is miles away by now. My net was closer than you thought! (*the man leans on cabinet for a moment—rage first of all rushes into his face, into his speech—he tries to speak—nothing articulate comes—then tears fill his eyes—he brushes them away with back of his hand—his face gradually becomes hard and set—he half turns his back on the woman—he draws revolver slowly—then with a heart-broken cry*)

OFFI. Constance! The end of it all. (*presses revol-*

ver to his temple. The woman has gradually moved down to him—contempt first of all in her face and movements—then astonishment—followed by pity and horror as she strikes his arm up)

LADY. Ah, no, no! Not that—not death! You have conquered! Captain Standish, you are a man! I respect you—I will save you. You will have your despatch—unopened—you will catch your train—you will be at Whitehall in time, and all through me. You wonder why? I will tell you. I saw something in your face then that I have never seen before. I saw you looking at death—meeting it—with the name on your lips of the woman you love. Captain Standish, I have learnt a good deal. You are a *great* man—England is a *great* country; you are heroes. (*movement by OFFICER*) No, no, no, do not speak. (*down to table C.*) It was to serve the man I love I sought to betray you—it is for the love some woman bears you I stepped between you and death. Oh! why are we women born with hearts? It is woman's wit betrays mankind; it is woman's heart that betrays herself. Mine has betrayed me! (*sinks into chair sobbing. OFFICER stands motionless, watching her; then, with gesture of pity, moves to her. Looking up*) There! it is all over! (*smiling at him*) Weak, eh? Quick, quick, quick! There is no time to lose! Ah! your keys, eh? (*takes the ring off table—looks at it*) Messenger! I would—like something—of yours—something you value—give me that ring. (*handing him the whole thing*)

OFFL. (L. C.) The signet ring? There. (*hands it to her*)

LADY. (R. C. *looking at it*) It was handed down to you by a brave man, it is given to me by a foolish one, eh?

OFFL. A very foolish one.

LADY. Shall I give you something? What will I give you? A picture, eh? Choose, (*indicating frame on table—then moving round back of table to R. He takes up frame, looks at the first one—opens it—the despatch falls out—pantomime—their eyes meet. He silently places the despatch in his pocket—takes out picture—holds out his hand—she extends hers—he kisses it*) A great risk, eh? Poof! It is all over! Come—quick—300 yards away there is a coach-house—in it a trap—the stables are next door—I will harness the horse myself—

drive you to the station—and all with one minute to spare. Take up your big bag. Ah, it is not so precious now, eh? The jewel is not there. Are you ready? (*he is putting on his coat*) Oh, will you blow out those candles? (*he extinguishes candles on cabinet and on mantelpiece*) Wait for me outside the window. (*he takes the bag and goes to window. She turns the lamp out—only moonlight in the room. He moves outside the window*) Don't move until I tell you—you might stumble. You must not make another false step now, eh? (*she joins him at window*) How beautiful the air is!

OFFI. You are shivering!

LADY. Am I? And yet I am burning. How pale you look in the moonlight. Give me your hand, messenger! How strong you are. You may trust me now—I will guide you safely—as safely as if you were my messenger! (*she closes the window—the click of the lock is heard—the two figures walk up the path in the moonlight hand in hand, and when they have quite vanished the curtain falls.*)

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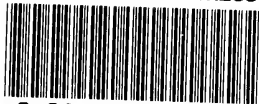
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